

Response Journals

Description

Response Journals can be set up in a number of ways and used for a variety of purposes. Response Journals are an opportunity for students to interact personally and independently with a piece of literature. Initially, students may be guided in their responses, with a Response Starters sheet, which provides a series of stems to be built into response statements. Later, students may work in a two-column response format, with prepared sheets or in their own notebooks.

Response Journals encourage students to make personal connections with the text, a valuable starting point for constructing their own understanding. As students become accustomed to and proficient with responding in a journal, they can be encouraged or guided to do more text analysis, employing higher-level thinking about the content.

Steps

1. Actively responding in a journal prompts thoughtful reactions to the selection and its relevance to students' lives or to life in general. As they make such connections while reading, students will come to a deeper understanding of the literature. As students are preparing to read a selection or a full-length book on their own, explain to them the reason for and importance of responding to literature. Ask students to give examples of things they might be thinking as they read their favorite genres. Have them be as specific and detailed as they can. Write students' ideas on the board.

2. Explain to students that in addition to the ideas they stated, there are many other things they might think about as they read. Pass out copies of the Response Journal Starters sheet. Review some of the stems on it. Model how you might apply some of them by reading aloud a portion of a selection the class is reading or has recently read. Encourage students to participate.

If necessary, take time to go through the list of starters with the class to ensure that students have a general understanding of what they mean. You might mention at what points in a selection certain starters may be particularly appropriate.

3. As students are preparing to read a new selection or a full-length book, pass out copies of the Two-Column Response Journal sheet. Model how to use this sheet, applying some of the response starters. Tell students to record their quotations in the left column and their responses to the quotation in the right column, using the response starters. As they use a starter, they may check it off on the sheet. Encourage students to use as many of the starters as they can.
4. When students have finished reading and responding, ask for volunteers to share their quotations and responses or have students share in groups. Encourage disagreement and discussion. Exposure to one another's responses will expand students' views of the responding possibilities. Have students staple the Response Starters sheet to the front of their Two-Column Response sheets. Students may save their work in a folder or notebook. Sharing personal responses is not necessary; it may be valuable as students are learning this strategy, but thereafter the strategy may be better as a personal one.

General Resources

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You may want some students to expand their Two-Column Response Journal sheets into a dialogue journal that they share with a partner. Tell them to add a third column labeled My Partner's Response. Then, have them exchange papers with a partner and react to the partner's responses through comments or questions. Partners should discuss their new ideas and insights at the end of the activity.

5. Point out to students that their responses to any reading are not limited to the response starters. They may respond in other ways as well, depending on their own insights into or feelings about what they are reading. When reading a selection from *Prentice Hall Literature*, they may also respond to the questions in the right margins.
6. Assign or encourage students to use Response Journals when reading any literature on their own. The ongoing practice will heighten their attention to the literary texts they read. Students might like to set up a notebook as a Response Journal and use it exclusively for this purpose.
7. To make students accountable, you might collect and read their Response Journals and provide constructive feedback on them.

Source

Ollmann, H.E. (1992). "Two-Column Response to Literature." *Journal of Reading*, 35:58.